



## WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

JAMES S. MARPE  
First Selectman

March 4, 2021

Energy and Technology Committee via email: [ETTestimony@cga.ct.gov](mailto:ETTestimony@cga.ct.gov)

Re: S.B. 937 "An Act Concerning Emergency Response Planning and Video Service Wire Removal."

Dear Committee Members:

The Town of Westport (the "Town") submits these written comments **in support** of S.B. 937 (the "Bill"), which would address numerous concerns and shortcomings that the Town experienced firsthand during Eversource's response to Tropical Storm Isaias in August of 2020.

In the storm's immediate aftermath, 97 percent of Eversource's Westport customers (households and businesses) were without power. Trees and debris, often including utility wires, blocked roads and driveways, trapping many residents in their homes and preventing emergency response personnel from responding to potential life-threatening situations – the most critical part of the Town's own storm response. In addition, traffic signals were not functional, causing hazardous driving conditions for those who could venture out, and businesses and those working from home were unable to communicate due to the loss of power, cellular and Wi-Fi services. Ultimately, the Town learned firsthand that municipalities need utility companies to make communities safe as quickly as possible following any storm, and any delay leaves residents extremely vulnerable and helpless.

Specifically, the Town supports S.B. 937 for the following reasons:

- (1) The Bill would require that PURA initiate a proceeding to investigate the development and adoption of make safe crew deployment by electric distribution company (EDC) after an emergency.

For the Town, the most discouraging aspect of Eversource's storm response was the uncoordinated make-safe process. Westport officials stood ready to respond, but in many instances, were paralyzed in the 48-hour period following the storm, while awaiting Eversource to make our community safe by de-energizing their downed wires. Per Eversource's regulations at the time, the Town should have been provided a "make safe crew" within 24 hours after the storm, so that wires could be de-energized before any tree work or clean up could begin. While we now know that one or more make safe crews appeared in Westport, our emergency management team was not informed and could not effectively coordinate its storm response efforts. As a result, the Town's Public Works response was unable to address wire-related incidents for three days after the storm, which was grossly inadequate with 97 percent of the Town being without power and the massive amount of storm related damage.

By requiring PURA to formally investigate make safe crew organization and deployment protocols, municipalities such as the Town will gain some reassurance that proper and effective protocols will be developed and implemented by EDCs under the authority and supervision of a neutral governmental agency best suited for such a role.

- (2) The Bill would require each EDC to develop an emergency response plan which includes, but is not limited to, how such company has the capacity to increase field workforce by at least 500%

during an emergency, provide accurate and current information to municipalities on the status of their communities make safe needs, and providing up to date GIS information 120 minutes after an emergency operations center has been opened.

As stated above, 97 percent of the Town was without power immediately after the storm, and for many power was not fully restored until 8 or more days later. Throughout that time, ratepayers had difficulty reaching an Eversource Customer Service Representative to report and follow-up on outages. When contact was made, many Representatives refused to initiate work orders because their records indicated that either the power in the respective area had been restored, even when it wasn't, or that the entire neighborhood was out, thereby negating the need to report the outage. Ratepayers should have the ability to understand EDCs' procedures and should expect a reasonable level of customer service- particularly in an emergency situation- so they know when they need to report and follow up on an outage, versus when they do not. In Westport emergency response leadership was not told where the restoration crews would be located, so the Town's clean-up crews were unable to follow the crews and coordinate.

Requiring increased workforce capacity and enhanced reporting requirements may help mitigate, and hopefully resolve on a go forward basis, the various delays and communication difficulties endured by the Town after the storm.

- (3) The Bill would require each EDC to establish a liaison program which includes, but is not limited to, training for such liaisons, a dedicated liaison for each municipality in the state, are engaged when make safe crews are deployed, who report to the CEO of the municipality for which they are assigned and provide accurate and current information to such CEO.

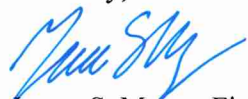
Despite numerous attempts, Westport officials were unable to reach the Eversource Operations Center until the afternoon on the second day after the storm. Substantive contact between a municipality and Eversource should be made within 24 hours after a storm, and ideally before the storm begins. Eversource outreach to the town was sporadic and often consisted of general briefings, which did not have useful or specific information. In addition, on or about the date of the storm, Eversource changed the process that the Town had typically used to share outage details in the past, and the Town was unable to effectively utilize the new format in a timely manner. It was clear from Westport's perspective that Eversource had an internal communications problem and that it was mostly unprepared.

By formalizing a robust liaison program with clear protocols that do not change – at least without sufficient notice to a municipality prior to an emergency – many of the issues faced by the Town could have seemingly been avoided. Communications is a top priority in these response situations, and this requirement would be an effective means to enhance the shortcomings experienced by the Town.

For all of the above reasons, the Town encourages the Committee to SUPPORT S.B. 937.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



James S. Marpe, First Selectman